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During the second half of the 20th century the Ford Foundation – at the time the world's largest private philanthropy – made a significant commitment to issues of cultural heritage as part of its international work in Asia. Across countries in South and Southeast Asia, in particular, foundation grants were made to governments, private institutions, and individuals engaged in a wide range of fields in the arts, humanities, and applied sciences such as archaeology. The Foundation's culture programs embraced *tangible heritage* as well as a range of *living traditions* and *cultural expression*. Such rubrics served as important labels locating culture within the broad portfolio of the Foundation's grant-making, as well as touchstones employed to justify philanthropy's attention to culture in contrast to the dominant emphasis of international aid on economic development and modernization. This paper will look at how one of the world's most important international philanthropies built a rationale for activism in cultural fields in Asia, how a decentralized format for local decision-making enabled sustained support for building capacity and knowledge in the arts and humanities, and, ultimately, how the 'culture lens' has gradually been displaced – or perhaps redefined – in the Foundation's current international work.

Keywords: Art; Asia; Culture; Ford Foundation; Philanthropy

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INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that American philanthropy, including activities in developing countries, is experiencing fundamental shifts. Philanthropy – often understood as using private wealth for public good – has been practiced in the United States for more than a century within a particular framework shaped by American laws, which made it possible for philanthropists to minimize their tax burden by giving away wealth for what are defined as 'charitable purposes'.

Primarily as a result of new technologies created by large and successful corporations, there is now a group of tremendously wealthy entrepreneurs and investors seeking to redefine the purposes and methods of philanthropic practice. Often called "philanthrocapitalists" (Edwards, 2008; Wilby, 2010), these entrepreneurs assert that being successful in business gives them the know-how to solve large-scale problems of poverty and deprivation. Their philanthropic organizations promote "business-like ways of working, business-like efficiency, and market-driven solutions to social problems" (Feinstein, 2011, p. 88). Instead of the 'bottom line' of corporate profit, they promise a 'bottom line' of social impact. Along with bottom-line thinking comes an emphasis on measuring

outcomes and tangible results. The language of metrics, benchmarks, risk-reward ratios, and scaling up now pervades the discourse of new philanthropies, making staff and their boards even more eager to see results quickly.

In his new book David Callahan scrutinizes major living donors, who he argues are forming a "heterogeneous new power elite" (Callahan, 2017, p. 8). He describes activist mega donors who want to be celebrated for carrying out their philanthropic mission and who maintain close personal control over their foundations, noting how in many cases donors are determined to give away all their wealth for specific purposes during their lifetimes, rather than leaving behind foundations that could evolve and chart new directions in perpetuity. The proponents of what is nowadays termed "venture philanthropy" (Frumkin, 2003) do appear more activist than earlier generations of foundation executives. Venture philanthropists craft social media messages to explain their goals, and have created a celebrity culture of giving away wealth. Like the rock star Bono, they want to personalize their giving, and to be seen among African villagers or Indian slum dwellers directly carrying out their philanthropic mission. The people changing philanthropy paradigms today using vast personal wealth come from all political backgrounds, including progressives such as George Soros and the ultra-conservative Koch brothers. When the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, and his wife, Priscilla Chan, recently announced the creation of a limited liability company for "advancing human potential and promoting equality" and pledged to give away 99% of their Facebook shares, public reaction to the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative was mixed (Soskis, 2015). Would this be a breathtaking example of private largess addressing major world problems, or another instance of a mega-philanthropy promising to cure social ills while promoting its own business brand?

Undoubtedly, philanthropy has grown, both in total assets and numbers of private foundations. According to the Foundation Center's database, in 2014 the United States had more than 86,700 grant making foundations, with total assets of over USD 865 billion. Some 30,000 new private foundations were created since 2000. U.S. Foundations made more than USD 60 billion in grants in 2014, both within the U.S. and abroad (Foundation Center, 2017). Increased public attention is drawn to new philanthropists pledging to 'change the world'. The tech entrepreneurs shaping new philanthropy "believe their charitable giving is bolder, bigger and more data-driven than anywhere else" (Stanley, 2015). Yet as some critics have argued, we need to challenge venture philanthropy's assumption that business logic is the same as the logic underlying complex social processes.[1] We might ask whether an emphasis on short-term results is leaving out more open-ended kinds of grant making that train community organizers, build institutions, or take risks through new kinds of social change experiments. We could consider whether an overarching concern with the bottom line and metrics "can drive grant making out of types of work whose results can be difficult to gauge, such as leadership development, work on race relations, [and] human rights education" (Berresford, 1999). In addition, we need to examine the notion that the most important philanthropy resonates with the urgency of today's media headlines.

1 See Edwards (2008) on the limits of philanthrocapitalism's promise to produce far-reaching change.

Outside the United States, the manner in which concentrated wealth is employed in top-down ways in development projects – often determining local non-profit agendas and skewing public policy priorities – needs to be more carefully analyzed (Massing, 2016). It is not that concern for persistent poverty or disease in the world is misplaced. The problem is that promoting solutions that are designed in foundation headquarters to be implemented in distant communities, or that are expressed in terms of precise technical inputs to be measured, removes the need to "consider the cultural, humanistic, and political sides of the equation" (Anft, 2015).

This paper considers whether culture itself is important, especially in non-Western contexts, as the 'new philanthropy' paradigm becomes dominant. At first glance, the prospects do not look promising. The philanthrocapitalist's emphasis on technical solutions and measurable results is not especially compatible with intangible subjects like the vitality of oral traditions, or for example the ways an ethnographic museum can build appreciation for a society's ethnic diversity. A tech entrepreneur may look at a multitude of world languages to be learned and taught and imagine inventing a universal translation tool, instead of less cutting edge approaches – such as endowing under-funded language departments of public universities. And in a world rife with injustice and inequalities, private philanthropy and governments alike tend to see cultural pursuits – including disciplines in the arts and humanities – as secondary priorities, if they count at all.

My aim here is to reflect on the record and the motivations of a leading global private foundation that for decades was active in cultural philanthropy across Asia. I will review the overall trajectory of the Ford Foundation's culture-focused philanthropy in its offices in South and Southeast Asia from the late 1970s into the 21st century. Tracing the various rationales underlying cultural grants leads us to a more complete view of the paradigms of engagement Ford employed in 'developing' countries. It also reveals clear distinctions between field office grants and Ford's domestic arts agenda, as well as intersections between cultural programs and other Foundation priorities. Given both notable changes in the field of philanthropy in recent years, as well as changes in Ford's emphases and ways of working, it is important to ask whether arts and culture are still relevant to its priorities, and what turns cultural grant making in Asia has taken.

EARLY SUPPORT FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

First, we must evoke the background of an institution that for many years was the world's wealthiest foundation, once described as "a large body of money completely surrounded by people who want some" (Macdonald, 1989, p. 3). Today, when the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation looms over the philanthropic landscape with assets of more than USD 60 billion, one forgets a time when it was Ford that regularly made major headlines in American discussions of private foundations. This prominence began in around 1950, when the Foundation was endowed with 90% of the stock of the Ford Motor Company.[2] By 1960 it had a corpus of over USD 3 billion, along

2 Eventually the Foundation divested from its Ford Motor Co. holdings, and the Ford family disassociated itself from the expanded global foundation.

with an annual budget much larger than that of the United Nations and its specialized agencies combined.[3] Within the legal environment for American philanthropy, it is important to note that during this period the more valuable the Ford Motor Company became, the more the Foundation's dividends increased, making it necessary to increase its grant making in order to preserve its tax-exempt status.[4]

Yet it was not the sheer scale of its resources that commanded attention when, in 1949, the Foundation announced its intention to address issues of global importance such as peace, democracy, and human welfare – it was the startling breadth and loftiness of its vision. From its beginnings in the 1930s as a small local family foundation that had supported the communities of auto factory workers around Dearborn, Michigan, Ford set out to become a major presence on the national and international stage. The founding text for its expanded mandate was a weighty document called the Gaither Report, which came out of a process involving multiple task forces and more than 1000 people charged to consider "the ways in which the Ford Foundation can most effectively and intelligently put its resources to work for human welfare" (Gaither, 1950, p. 13). The Gaither Report provided the conceptual scaffolding for the international edifice Ford would build through its network of overseas field offices, a key part of its expansive mission to solve the world's problems. And this brings us to New Delhi, Yangon (Rangoon), and Jakarta, where the first field offices in Asia were launched.

Let us imagine a scene in Burma in 1953, not long after the Ford Foundation opened a field office in Rangoon as part of an expanding presence in Asia. Departing from its pattern of funding projects in public administration and agriculture, the Foundation decided to support a request from the Burmese Government for the creation of an International Institute of Advanced Buddhist Studies, which would foster activities in Pāli scholarship and organize the Sixth Great Buddhist Council. The Council was to convene for two years between the full moons of May 1954 and 1956, gathering 15,000 Buddhist monks and scholars from all over Asia. According to its proponents, the Institute was "expected to become the spiritual center of Southeast Asia, radiating … irresistible and overpowering rays of Wisdom, Truth, and Righteousness" (Macdonald, 1989, pp. 66-69).[5]

This intriguing gesture to Burma's heritage was just the first in a record of grants supporting cultural heritage in numerous Asian countries for more than 50 years. Cultural interests first emerged for Ford in a systematic way in India, where its first overseas office had opened in New Delhi in 1952. In 1955, for example, the Foundation established the Southern Languages Book Trust to publish great works of literature and philosophy in the four major languages of South India. The following year, the Foundation purchased from the Museum of Modern Art in New York a thousand copies

3 At the end of 2014, the Foundation had USD 14.4 billion in assets; it gave away some USD 518 million during that year.

4 The United States Congress established rules for foundations, including the requirement to use a certain percentage of their assets annually for what are defined as 'charitable activities'.

5 See Macdonald (1989, pp. 66-69) for more details on Foundation grant 05400155. Its budget of that time of USD 327,000 would be the equivalent of USD 2.9 million in 2015 – an extraordinary amount for an initial commitment even today, and evidence of the Foundation's relative wealth. At this early point, Ford's annual grant budget was about four times as large as that of second biggest U.S. foundation (Rockefeller Foundation).

of books and multiple film prints, products of an exhibition MOMA had organized on Indian handloom textiles and crafts (Gandhi, 2002, p. 4). While the ostensible aim of this grant was to reintroduce 'principles of good design' to Indian cottage industry, it also clearly acknowledged the immense creative wealth of India's artisan communities.

I cite these examples of early cultural grants to note how the Ford Foundation's stance within the post-colonial Asian dynamic of continuity and change included an inclination toward the arts and humanities. The Gaither Report lauded the importance of scientific investigation and "professional experts generating objective knowledge" (Francis X. Sutton, in Macdonald, 1989, p. xv)[6] and for some years the Foundation was guided by this 'heady prospectus' in setting its priorities. Arts and culture were not among those priorities initially, but thinking changed and with its resources growing rapidly – thus making it a necessity to disperse many more dollars each year – in 1957 the Foundation looked seriously at the needs of American creative artists and the potential for providing support to projects of 'national significance'. The Arts and Culture program launched in the United States in 1962 aimed to raise the arts to new levels of achievement and fiscal stability through long-term support to a group of promising institutions. The enormous impact of the USD 400 million spent in the 1980s can still be seen in the worlds of dance, regional theater, symphony orchestras, and arts management throughout the United States. Ford's support for the arts both stimulated U.S. private and corporate gifts to arts institutions and influenced the creation of the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities. The creative force behind this landmark initiative was W. McNeil Lowry, who saw the arts and humanities as an important counterbalance to the Foundation's focus on social sciences and research.

Cultural programming emerged very differently in the Asian settings where Ford worked. Field offices produced culture grants in a decentralized way, depending on local contexts, inclinations of Foundation staff, and direct encouragement from country directors, called Representatives. The 1950s and 60s were years when issues of nation-building and economic development dominated international relations and Western states were fixed on the ideological competition with Soviet and Chinese communist spheres.[7] In India, with its flagship field office, Ford worked with the government to find ways to improve rural life. In response to the invitation of Prime Minister Nehru, the Foundation supported modernization and reorganization of village industries, which led to increased attention to traditional handloom and handicraft producers, thus raising the possibility of culture as a focus for development efforts. The Foundation helped start the National Institute of Design in 1961, urging "the cooperation of ethnologists, art historians, and village teachers with a feeling for the true cultural past" (Gandhi, 2002, p. 5).

6 Macdonald (1989) labels the Gaither Report's language "foundationese", as in the following: "The problems of mankind must be solved, if they are to be solved at all, by a combined use of all those types of knowledge by which human affairs may be influenced" (p. 139).

7 The Foundation's initial cultural efforts were focused mainly in Europe, reflecting the conviction that exchange of ideas and cultural achievements could help promote peace in the wake of World War II's "devastating effect on the European intellectual community … American observers feared that Marxism and Communism would exert a growing appeal among these disaffected intellectuals…" (McCarthy, 1987, p. 94). The Foundation's first President, Paul Hoffman, had served as administrator of the Marshall Program in Europe, and firmly believed in nongovernmental cultural diplomacy.

At the same time, efforts in language development and publishing such as the Southern Languages Book Trust, along with bilingual education and English language training, reflected the importance of India's multilingual and multicultural environment. The Trust also reflected the geopolitics of the Cold War,[8] as the Soviet Union was supporting a steady stream of cheap books in Indian vernaculars at the time. In newly independent Burma, competing East/West ideologies, along with the need to unite an ethnically diverse people, were clear factors in the creation of the International Institute for Advanced Buddhist Studies mentioned above. The suggestion that Ford Foundation might support the Institute – which was called the Pāli Project – was made in writing by a U.S. aid mission official, who cited Premier U Nu's opinion that "the popular belief that Americans work solely for the benefit of themselves or others is one of the strongest weapons in the hands of Communist propagandists in Southeast Asia" (Macdonald, 1989, p. 67).

The rationale that intergroup unity and democratic values would greatly assist the nation-building process became linked to concern for culture, as reflected in Ford Foundation program guidelines for the 1960s:

> The successful development of new nations includes, and in part depends on, cultural and intellectual factors. New nations seek to 'discover' their own cultures, and to achieve greater clarity concerning their national purposes…it is proposed that Overseas Development support carefully selected projects designed to further these less tangible but important purposes of developing nations. (Ford Foundation, 1960s)

An equally significant justification for Foundation involvement with India's culture was articulated in the mid-1960s by a Ford consultant, Arthur Isenberg, who argued that India's classical past and its 'folk culture' were threatened by urbanization and rapid change. By this time the Rangoon field office had closed, as the Foundation was ordered to leave Burma after the military takeover of 1962. In 1969 a small grant for heritage preservation created an opening for new programming; this was reinforced by positive signals from the Foundation's Trustees.[9] A contraction in Foundation assets through the 1970s (due to a broad U.S. economic downturn) meant "the Foundation's enthusiastic conversion to the idea of conserving India's cultural past had to be curbed" (Gandhi, 2002, p. 10). By 1978, however, the Foundation approved a comprehensive program centered on preservation for India. This program would grow and evolve, sparking grants in India and other Asia offices for more than two decades.

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8 Much has been made of the degree to which Ford and other private foundations were linked to the Cold War policies of the U.S. government, particularly the Central Intelligence Agency, through entities such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom. The debate over these activities is peripheral to this essay, but relevant discussion can be found in Saunders (2000), Epstein (1967), McCarthy (1987), and a variety of other sources. Coming from another direction, the Foundation was also targeted as "leftist" in the press for its work on civil liberties and racial discrimination, which led to a series of congressional investigations in the 1950s and 1960s (Macdonald, 1989, pp. 27-35; Rosenfield, 2015, pp. 7, 23). And when Henry Ford II resigned from the Board of Trustees in 1976, severing the last Ford family ties with the Foundation, he criticized the organization "for attacking the capitalist economic system that had created it" (Rosenfield, 2015, p. 24).

9 Chairman of the board Alexander Heard wrote in 1970 that "to interpret and make visible the cultural heritage of many a developing nation ought to contribute to a sense of national pride and to the much discussed sense of identity that everyone seems to want these days" (Zurbuchen, 1994, p.15).

Key Programming Themes

The geography and modality of the Foundation's support for arts and humanities in Asia looks different from one vantage point to another. At various times the Foundation made grants in the arts and humanities in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. The history of this support is highly variable, with no fixed template determining which kinds of grants should be approved. There were scant policy guidelines for officers interested in working on cultural topics, and no specific annual budget allocation for such grants. On occasion, grants were conceived opportunistically without a longer-term strategic framework. Some culture programs were sparsely staffed, with field offices often relying on part-timers or consultants for this work. Officers whose actual assignments were in other fields such as education, social sciences, or human rights might have managed culture grants. Those staff members frequently responded in a more or less ad hoc way to opportunities to support cultural activities within the constraints of time and budgets imposed by their primary program responsibilities. In the following discussion, I will focus on the larger, sustained programs in arts and culture in countries where officers were assigned to develop clearly articulated visions. Those offices are New Delhi (which made grants in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) and Indonesia (which also managed activities in Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam, at different periods).

It is vexingly hard to be precise in tracking how much the Foundation spent on culture outside of the United States, because the structure of Ford's program division and its accounting codes changed over the years. For the most part, culture programs in Asia fell under larger categories such as *Education, Media, Arts and Culture*, and received small slices of annual field office budgets. Between 1984 and 1994, for example, the largest expenditures in all overseas offices went to grants under the categories of Rural Poverty and Resources, International Affairs, and Education. During this same period, *Cultural Preservation and Interpretation* accounted for about 13% of all grant dollars in India, and 18% in Indonesia (Zurbuchen, 1994, appendix tables 2 and 4). These amounts were probably the highest among all overseas offices, since culture grants tended to be fewer in Ford's Latin America and Africa offices. Budgets for culture never approached the scale of arts expenditures in the U.S. program. In the 1984-1994 period, culture-related grants in Asia totaled roughly USD 21.5 million dollars, a mere 8% of total Asia grant expenditures. In general, it seems that field office representatives could feel confident in recommending annual culture program budgets as long as these remained subsidiaries to their major 'developing country' agenda. Addressing poverty, illness, and injustice would claim the major portion of field office resources even as robust cultural programs grew.

Taking a closer look at how country programs responded to opportunities to engage with culture, we turn to sites receiving the largest commitment to the arts and humanities in Asia: India, Indonesia and (on a smaller scale) Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam. While the specifics of each field office's grants differed widely, several key themes stand out across the region and over nearly thirty years.

Heritage Conservation

The Foundation initially addressed cultural issues as a matter of material heritage – the *cultural property* that manifests history and identity in tangible form. National governments were often open to outside technical assistance for preservation of monuments, archaeological sites, and movable property such as ethnographic collections or hand-written documents. Thus, the India office worked with institutions such as the Archaeological Survey of India, Deccan College in Pune, the New Delhi School of Architecture, the cities of Jaipur and Ahmedabad, and public and private manuscript collections to support training, research, and improved technologies in the fields of archaeology, urban conservation planning, and manuscript documentation. Similar grants for archaeological training and research were made in Sri Lanka, and Bhutan's National Museum received assistance in managing national art and manuscript collections. In Indonesia, conservation of monuments, advanced training for archaeologists and museologists, and manuscript preservation for endangered collections in the palaces of Central Java and the National Library were all supported. In Thailand, Foundation funds helped launch an important program to conserve the wealth of mural paintings in Buddhist temples, in partnership with the government's Fine Arts Department.

All this heritage work opened up deeper challenges and questions about the validity of culture grant making. Identifying heritage conservation as a goal is hardly helpful, one Foundation staffer observed, in deciding *what* to preserve. Material remains of the past can be appropriated by power centers to legitimize dominant ideologies, as when India's Babri Masjid was claimed as a Hindu site, or when archaeological evidence of ancient Tamil settlement in Sri Lanka conflicted with the politics of national history. The conservation of the past might sharpen conflicts when, say, excavation activity threatens local settlement or livelihoods. Involvement of a foreign institution with cultural property can aggravate local or nationalistic sensitivities. And even when a project is successful – such as the microfilm documentation of thousands of pages of frail manuscripts – there remain questions of public or scholarly interest, interpretation, and survival of that written heritage in its new format.

Still, the record of Ford's cultural grants produced many compelling arguments for attention to material heritage. Learning from history and appreciating links with the past tend to be viewed as significant in most societies – a reality that needs recognition in wealthier countries where the existence of archives, libraries, museums, and other cultural resources is often taken for granted. On the local level, culture grants drew attention and appreciation from government and private institutions. By means of its sustained culture program the Foundation earned credibility among governments, artists, and scholars for supporting activities other major donors would not consider. On the international level, Ford's attention to cultural heritage reinforced the major investments it was making in the 1960s and 1970s to build international and area studies in U.S. universities. As Benedict Anderson notes, post-WW II U.S. government agencies put priority on expanding much-needed international scholarship, "but very large private institutions, especially the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, also played an important role, partly offsetting the 'policy' focus of the state. Senior officials in these foundations … were more liberal in their outlook than state functionaries, and somewhat less obsessed with combating 'world communism'" (Anderson, 2016, p. 34).

In some measure, then, the Foundation's contributions to capacity-building in archaeology, museology, and conservation sciences resulted in benefits for Asian institutions and communities who would, it was argued by foundation officers, be better able to interpret and utilize the past for the common good.

Cultural Transmission

It is not very far from conservation of tangible heritage, of course, to the intangible dimensions of culture. Core issues here involve change and vitality of cultural forms over time, and processes through which meaning is conveyed to audiences and across generations within the larger social, environmental, and religious settings of particular groups. The passing of skills and practice from older to younger, the dissemination of art forms to new audiences, and the formation of new relations between patrons, practitioners, and consumers are all part of the 'transmission' idea.

Living traditions are always in a state of change; tradition is neither fixed nor static. As the Foundation saw it by the 1980s, many arts genres in Asia faced qualitative changes of such magnitude that their survival was threatened.[10] Minority groups under the hegemony of strong national centers and with new languages and educational systems to master found their inherited arts ignored, undervalued or otherwise marginalized. Changes in how an art form is transmitted, for instance from oral to written media, or in relations between artists and traditional sources of patronage, disrupt continuity. Formal education, the politics of language, and modern media all have profound effects on cultural transmission.

The Foundation put considerable effort into assisting arts practitioners to sustain and convey older forms of expression. In India, funds helped classical musicians and dance masters document their traditions and adapt older systems of pedagogy to new social and economic conditions. Folk culture studies became a major program for the New Delhi office, with goals of strengthening field research as well as the role of expressive arts in social development and communications. In Indonesia, meanwhile, cultural transmission required paying attention to ethnic diversity, oral traditions and performance genres across a large archipelago where heavy-handed bureaucracies were seeking to 'guide' and 'improve' local religious and cultural expression. Indonesian arts were also being disrupted by adaptation to modern education, as masters of performance traditions were increasingly expected to become credentialed instructors in the government's conservatories and arts academies.

While in India folk culture studies provided a strong interdisciplinary focus for traditional arts, in Indonesia the field of world music or ethnomusicology became a key organizing principle, embracing both arts of the traditional aristocracy as well as diverse village-based performance genres. Foundation staff worked with arts academies and field researchers as they developed new humanities curricula and practitioner networks. Independent national organizations such as the Society for Indonesian Performing Arts and the Oral Traditions Association took shape. In the Philippines, Ford supported ethnomusicology in the academy and archiving of

10 One document attributed the threats to a "rush toward economic growth and social modernization" and "changes in public values", suggesting "the task, then, is to help national elites be more comfortable with their own pasts" (Ford Foundation, 1978, p. 20).

field recording collections developed by José Maceda of the Philippines, whose pioneering research illustrated commonalities among performance genres throughout Southeast Asia.

One conceptual challenge in arts grant making involves finding a balance between scholarly and activist approaches. It was important to move beyond the academic atmosphere of arts institutes to direct engagement with living traditions in the communities that keep them vital. Thus, in Thailand a unique oral history project gathered stories of life and culture from displaced Khmer refugees in camps along the border. In Indonesia in the 1990s, Ford sponsored a major recording project involving the Smithsonian Institution and the Society for Indonesian Performing Arts, which over ten years documented musical styles in 23 provinces, resulting in a landmark 20-CD series with the Folkways Records label.[11] In Vietnam, support went for a competition providing small grants to community-based arts groups to record, document or research their own arts, generating materials on ritual, crafts, performing arts, and languages among 30 ethnic minority communities across 39 provinces.[12]

Foundation culture programs also tried to take account of interlinked processes of economic and social change, and of the impact of contemporary media and communications revolutions. Issues of cultural transmission involve not only changes in the arts but also the survival of entire ways of life. As struggles over control of forest land intensified across Southeast Asia, community resource use patterns, material culture, and local identities all became threatened by larger political and economic forces. Culture programs thus intersected with the Foundation's concerns to reduce poverty and address issues to do with rights and governance.

Creative Expression

Over time, the emphasis of Ford's culture grants in Asia shifted from 'cultural preservation and interpretation'– one of the frequent categories found in the documents – to include concerns for vitality and diversity. Program officers were interested in encouraging innovative, experimental, critical work in a variety of media. They felt an emphasis on creative expression would help incorporate the experiences of underrepresented groups into national life; support the emergence of new idioms in traditional arts; develop stronger capacities, new audiences, and channels for cultural expression; and, clarify the links between contemporary expression and its context, including traditional forms. What are the multiple stances toward modernity and tradition that artists attempt? What is the role of the artist in a post-traditional, heavily state-controlled environment? Would improving the infrastructure for arts organizations result in better conditions for creative work?

Field offices supported creativity in varied ways. In India, a theater laboratory project supported contemporary theater directors in experimental work drawing on local and folk genres, and also helped promising theater groups to develop new methodologies and share innovations. Indonesian arts and literary groups organized

11 The *Music of Indonesia* project is described in detail in Ford Foundation (2003, p. 194).

12 The *Folk Arts and Culture Fund* — administered by the Center for Educational Exchange with Vietnam — has supported some 170 local projects to date (Nguyen Thi Thanh Binh, personal communication, 09 March 2016).

national celebrations of local arts, oral tradition, and regional languages. The Hanoi office provided training abroad for young Vietnamese filmmakers and helped them showcase their productions, while a new supporting organization was created in Indonesia to help arts organizations in management, strategic planning, and funding strategies. Both offices in India and Indonesia provided resources for exploring the outreach and public service potential of broadcast media, including community radio and the expanding television spectrum. The explosive growth of digital media and the Internet in the first years of the 21st century prompted grants for studying new media access, analysis of emerging creative and copyright issues and innovations in documentary film.

Again, principles of selection were an issue. The Foundation did not stipulate global policies to help in the choice of which artistic or expressive field to encourage. Program staff needed to consult widely to understand the conditions that support, limit, and channel creativity within a particular field. They looked to expression of local needs, selecting points of entry through cooperation with consultants and expert committees, and through stimulation of dialogues among key actors in a particular field.

Culture and Identities

In the 1950s and 60s, important changes were taking hold in post-colonial Asian states, and the consolidation of national identities was a ubiquitous project. The 'unity in diversity' motto was heard in calls for integration and assimilation, both political and cultural. National unity was inscribed on material heritage, too, as historic sites and artifacts were seen as defining a people's shared identity. If that identity was strong, it was argued, people could be resilient in the face of the manifold pressures of modernization. Even in Thailand, which had escaped direct European colonization, destabilization brought by conflicts in Indochina meant that "Thai cultural identity was … subject to severe pressures of an accelerated westernization and modernization process" (Klausner, 1991). A surge of thefts of valuable images from Buddhist temples, and the embarrassing disappearance of hundreds of objects from the collection of the National Museum, prompted leaders of cultural institutions to look for ways of "inculcating in the Thai public a sense of pride in their rich cultural heritage" (W. Klausner, personal communication, 24 February 2016). The Foundation's support for research and training in both archaeology and mural painting conservation emerged in part from such locally-expressed concerns, which included anxiety over the impact of a large American military presence on Thailand's social norms.

Of course, even when nation-building ideologies were dominant, and as Cold War-related conflicts led to Vietnam's American War and the Indonesian annexation of East Timor, counter-narratives to the national unity theme have been regularly voiced. In the last years of the twentieth century most areas of Ford's work, including governance, livelihoods, and human rights, became linked in one way or another to the acceptance and expression of distinct identities within the national fabric. Working with the cultural sector in Vietnam, for example, a portfolio of grants expanded effective arts management, to "create space for artists to reflect on issues of identity in the context of rapid socio-economic change" (Stern, 2003, p. 42).

Emphasizing diversity[13] through cultural grants both underscored and contributed to each of the other program themes in field office settings. There is resonance between India's folk culture institutions and advocates working for rights of the *dalit* and tribal groups of the country. Local artists recording oral epics in uplands Vietnam raise the profile of minority ethnic communities whose access to forest land is being undermined by national policy. A research project on traditional arts and the Islamic heritage of Java can address a growing rhetoric of discrimination and exclusion that would seek to suppress the performing arts on grounds of religious orthodoxy.

SHAPING A COMMITMENT

There were, of course, other actors in the culture field in Asia during the years I am discussing here. Most of these were bilateral or multilateral agencies representing a government, as with Germany's Goethe Institute, or groups of governments, like UNESCO, which has long promoted heritage sites of global importance and whose *Intangible Cultural Heritage program* was defined in its 2003 convention. Embassies – including those of former colonizers – benefit from the 'soft diplomacy' of sponsoring a museum exhibition or donating to a restoration project. Nonetheless, among U.S. private charitable groups it is rare for foundations to take more than sporadic interest in international cultural matters.[14] For most of its history, for example, the Rockefeller Foundation focused on medicine and agriculture in its developing country philanthropy.[15] Organizations that focus on tangible heritage include the J. Paul Getty Trust, which is most active in Europe and the Mediterranean. However, Getty is an operating foundation, meaning that it implements its own projects, in contrast to a grant making foundation like Ford, which funds independent groups. Japanese foundations have been active in sponsoring cultural projects in Southeast Asian countries, but this interest has been relatively recent and primarily involves academic research and collaborations (the Japan and Nippon Foundations are good examples), or restoration of particular historic sites or shrines (as some East Asian trusts have done in Hoi An, the historic trade port of central Vietnam). The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, based in Geneva, works across the Muslim world (including Malaysia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh) on conservation of historic cities, musical heritage, and architecture and urban design.

Still, it is clear that Ford's role in support of a wide range of cultural activities was for decades unique among donors working in Asia. By the late 1990s, professional staff with assignments in what was by then called Education, Media, Arts and Culture (EMAC) were located in Jakarta, Hanoi, New Delhi, and Beijing; together with new

13 It is notable that the Foundation took diversity seriously both internally and in grant making. Through the 1980s and 1990s, both Presidents Franklin Thomas and Susan Berresford stressed that racial and gender representation were important for the composition of the Board of Trustees as well as in staffing.

14 Important exceptions here are the Henry R. Luce Foundation and a Rockefeller offshoot, the Asian Cultural Council; both are based in New York and are much smaller philanthropies than Ford. While ACC has had small offices in East Asia, its grants primarily support individual artists from the U.S. or Asia. The Luce Foundation's emphasis is to strengthen knowledge of Asia among Americans and it has no field offices.

15 From 2001-2007, Rockefeller's innovative program in the Greater Mekong Subregion recognized transnational cultural dynamics and included grants in arts and humanities; see Sciortino (2016).

EMAC appointments in Cairo, Lagos, Nairobi, and Moscow, Ford's global 'footprint' in culture reached a high point. A number of prominent initiatives in Asia from the early 1990s reflected this broadening commitment. Ford provided significant support for the Festival of Indonesia in 1990-91, an 18-month series of museum exhibitions, performances, film showings, conferences, folklife celebrations, and other events that provided many Americans with their first glimpse of Indonesia's rich cultural heritage. At about the same time, Ford made an endowment grant to establish the India Foundation for the Arts, now one of India's leading independent foundations, with programs encouraging new forms of creativity and arts education across the country.

What factors have been critical to the longevity and sustained focus of Ford's programs? Doubtless Ford's commitment to having offices in the countries where it works was an essential condition enabling culture grant making. Philanthropy based in field offices made it possible for the Foundation to develop long-term relationships with local individuals and institutions; to work more closely with grantees on development and implementation of projects; and, to generate ground-level experience and insights important for senior management and the Foundation as a whole. Even though Asian field offices have opened and closed at different moments in line with emerging opportunities or internal policy, most of Ford's culture grants were made within field offices with a well-established local presence such as in Bangkok, New Delhi, Jakarta or Dhaka.

The Foundation's overseas offices have generally not functioned as branches of headquarters, but have typically stressed local context and settings in shaping grant programs. Ford's Representatives in Asia tended to enjoy a high level of autonomy in exploring and setting local office grant making priorities, working within the broad guidelines set every few years by the Foundation's Trustees and the biennial grant budgets allocated by New York. Grant approvals up to a certain level are delegated to local Representatives,[16] who also play a key role in selecting field office professional staff. The Foundation looks for program officers with local experience and relevant language and intercultural skills to serve terms of roughly three to six years; often, staff have often been recruited from university faculty, research institutes or international non-profit groups.

In building a program of grants under a theme such as "cultural preservation, vitality and interpretation", the Foundation looked for people with humanities backgrounds who could articulate a vision linking one set of grants to others in the portfolio. Deep local knowledge and professional experience were critical to working with potential grantees in responsive, creative, and flexible ways. In turn, strategic thinking implied longer-term commitment to working with a group of grantee organizations, avoiding a random succession of unrelated grants. At the same time, staff were expected to look for special opportunities or new openings to work with talented people, young organizations, or to build new constituencies to address persistent issues.

This emphasis on long-term commitment, along with local autonomy and flexibility in identifying grantees, meant that Foundation staff could build relationships

16 As of 2000, for example, any field office grant with a budget up to USD 100,000 was approved by the Representative. This kind of delegated authority is not typical of most international philanthropy.

over time through travel to different regions of a country, through broad consultations, and through bringing together different skill sets or points of view in addressing important issues. For example, when the Bangkok office decided to help the Thai government with its mural painting conservation program, companion grants were made to the International Centre for the Study of Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property in Rome (ICCROM), which provided important technical assistance.[17] When the Jakarta office developed a program aimed at promoting appreciation of cultural diversity through private radio and television outlets, broadcasters and programmers from all over Indonesia were brought together to share ideas (Ford Foundation, 2003, p. 219). This kind of 'convening power' often led to important and unexpected connections in grant making, and is the kind of role Ford could play by virtue of local offices open to different kinds of people, institutions, and ideas.

Employing staff responsible for cultural grant making, the Foundation built its own capacity for awareness of local priorities, values, and issues beyond the mainstream technocratic focus on development followed by major donors. Within the field office, staff assigned to different programs often worked as a team, consulting each other and sometimes jointly developing grants. One grant in Indonesia funded environmental conservation and oral traditions research in the Kayan Mentarang tropical rainforest reserve in Kalimantan, and involved program officers working on both community resource management and cultural vitality who shared goals of strengthening the ability of forest-dwelling peoples to preserve their ways of life. The culture program officer thus served as an example of the kind of 'engaged expertise' that views heritage as something represented by whole communities and environments (Salemink, 2016). At the same time, Ford was cautious about claiming credit for the results of particular projects; its philosophy tended to carefully distinguish the Foundation's profile as the *grantor* – sharing ideas and providing funds – from the *grantee*'s role in carrying out projects.

A HERITAGE WORTH SUSTAINING

Having worked as a Foundation officer during more than two decades in Asian settings, I have wondered what place cultural interests have in American philanthropy. Is there a 21st century relevance in the Ford Foundation's perspectives on creativity, transmission, and identities discussed above? The emergence of 'new philanthropy', with its emphasis on business-like practice and measurable outcomes, has not been accompanied by a new wave of grant making in cultural fields. One reason arts and culture may be less compelling for philanthropy today is that studying foreign countries has suffered significant retrenchment in America's academic realms. Over the past two decades, the multidisciplinary area studies model for learning about the world, prominent since World War II, has been discounted as orientalist and Eurocentric (Gibson-Graham, 2004). While alternative models – subaltern studies, post-modernism and cultural studies – have emerged, much social science research has turned to the study of large data sets and away from close study of cultural context. In the United States,

17 Not incidentally, through its work with Thai conservators ICCROM developed new techniques for restoration of mural painting in tropical conditions – expertise that could be used in other places and contribute to building global knowledge.

basic government funding for area and international studies has been drastically reduced. The Ford Foundation's domestic program in area studies was cut back in the 1980s, thus undermining the salience once fostered between domestic programs – promoting knowledge of the world among Americans – and international cultural grant making.

The technology revolution itself may well have helped to dim the allure of international studies. With the Internet at our fingertips and social media linking anyone anywhere, much of the world now appears accessible and 'knowable' through web surfing and cyberworld networking. Further, we have seen widespread erosion of support for the humanities in U.S. schools and universities, supplanted by a belief that only the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, math) can produce market-ready citizens with skills for the 21st century workplace.[18] Arguments that "humanities enhance our culture" or transmit "the best that has been thought and said" are no longer effective, says critic Stanley Fish, arguing that university administrators have shirked their duty to aggressively defend the humanities as an essential part of what a university should be doing (Fish, 2010).

In this environment, it might well seem counter-intuitive or retrograde to promote the arts and culture as important for philanthropy. Yet the new president of the Ford Foundation seems to be keeping the arts within view, at least for domestic grant making purposes. After taking the helm in 2013, Darren Walker announced in 2015 that all Foundation grant making would be organized and streamlined around the *concept of inequality*. One of the seven thematic areas now featured on Ford's website is *Creativity and Free Expression*, which "play a central role in weaving the fabric of a just society – a society in which exclusion and inequality can never stand unchallenged" (Ford Foundation, 2017). As the Foundation invests in organizations "that are pivotal in fighting inequality and making meaningful progress in creativity and free expression", it will further focus grant making under two sub-themes: "Social justice storytelling" and "21st century arts infrastructure" (Ford Foundation, 2017). Walker has spoken eloquently on how the arts "create economies of empathy" in building social movements. If there is crisis in the arts world, it is in part because "we have raised market-oriented thinking above all other kinds and categories of human understanding" (Walker, 2015). He argues that the United States' greatness is revealed through its arts, and that America currently suffers from a poverty "of heart and mind, of spirit and soul, of civic imagination" which can be addressed through sustained funding for the arts (Walker, 2017).

Some of the Foundation's recent domestic grants reflect this orientation. For example, a grant of USD 10 million to United States Artists will build an endowment for that group to continue providing grants to individual artists in a range of fields and genres. The 'storytelling strategy' in the U.S. embraces Ford's *JustFilms* documentary initiative, and *arts infrastructure* builds on what Ford has already been doing in the U.S. for some years under the rubric of *supporting diverse arts spaces*. In 2015, the Foundation made a total of 141 grants totaling USD 44.5 million under the *Freedom of Expression* theme (now superseded); over half of this support went for arts

18 While there is no space here for detailed discussion, it seems clear that a decline in public support for tertiary education, and the fact that humanities subjects do not bring major research dollars to universities, has contributed to shifting priorities.

spaces, while most of the rest of the grants supported media access and the JustFilms initiative. There were also grants to a number of mainstream New York cultural institutions (Metropolitan Opera Association, New York Shakespeare Festival, New York Public Library, Vivian Beaumont Theater, etc.), suggesting that Ford intends to maintain a place among the city's prominent arts patrons.

This all sounds reassuring for culture in the United States, but the picture does not appear as bright when we look at the Foundation's overseas activities. In Ford's field offices, in fact, culture programs were curtailed under Walker's predecessor.[19] While Walker himself served as Vice President for Education, Media, Arts and Culture, at the same time, a focus on public service media and Internet access was enlarged. Program officers assigned to work on cultural vitality and interpretation disappeared around 2007, and today it is not clear whether any field office staff have specific roles under *Creativity and Free Expression*.[20] The 2015 grants database includes a handful of grants under *Diverse Arts Spaces* from the Cairo and Mexico City field offices; there are none from Asia offices. In 2016 some 171 grants related to Creativity and Free Expression were made worldwide for a total of USD 69.3 million; in Asia, there were only seven grants (two in China and five in Indonesia). While it may still be too early to fully define new directions in cultural programming, the relative absence of culture among current Asia field office priorities is not encouraging.

There are other reasons to wonder how Ford will treat cultural issues and problems in future, and whether new philanthropy perspectives and models have perhaps taken root more deeply during its program realignment. For example, the Foundation for many years used a succinct media tag for acknowledgment on television and radio: "Ford Foundation: A resource for innovative people and institutions worldwide". Today, however, the Foundation sees itself as "Working with visionaries on the frontlines of social change worldwide, to address inequality in all its forms". The new tag posits an activist stance, putting the donor right alongside, if not leading, grantees in the social justice struggle. One wonders whether those who might hesitate to claim the status of visionaries can still get a hearing from the Foundation, and whether support for individual artists and scholars has been eclipsed by a focus on institution-building.

The way Ford now describes Creativity and Free Expression stresses utility and purpose: art as instrument for something else. The arts do not exist in and of themselves; they "address inequality" and "contribute to a fairer and more just society" (Ford Foundation, 2017). There is no doubt that storytelling exists in a myriad of contexts around the world, responding to varied social, educational or communitarian needs. However, for the Foundation it necessarily "addresses issues of justice" and "fuels change" (Ford Foundation, 2017). There is more than a hint of agenda-setting here; how will this lexicon be translated, literally and figuratively, outside the United States? Who decides which projects will "transform attitudes that perpetuate injustice" (Supporting the most innovative, 2016)[21] and how will results in terms of

19 Luis Ubiñas was Ford's President from 2007-2013.

20 Staffing and assignments are still shifting in the wake of President Walker's realignment around inequality. My comments reflect current information available at www.fordfoundation.org, as well as discussions with several field office observers.

21 From a description on Ford's website of a recent Foundation grant in partnership with the Skoll and

attitudes and more justice be assessed? A recent profile of Darren Walker in *The New Yorker* described ongoing debates about the implications of addressing inequality: "Ford believed in supporting art as a means of disrupting dominant narrative", notes the author, "but art didn't always do what you wanted it to" (MacFarquhar, 2016).

Because the Foundation has long played a leading role in drawing attention to issues of cultural vitality and interpretation in Asia, eliminating cultural programs is certain to have an impact on the larger field. There is data suggesting that Ford's turn away from culture in its international work is already having an effect. According to the Foundation Center,[22] in 2002 Ford provided by far the largest share of grants for Arts and Culture to recipients outside the United States, making 138 grants (39% of the number of grants made in this category) with a total value of USD 20.1 million (equal to 42% of the amount of resources all US foundations provided for Arts and Culture outside the United States). As of 2012, Ford still made the largest number of Arts and Culture grants (61, or 21% of the total), but provided only USD 12.2 million in overseas grants (just 20% of the total grant amounts). Further, while in 2002 there were eleven Asian grantee organizations on the Foundation Center's list of the top 50 recipients of Arts and Culture grants outside the US, by 2012 there were only two Asian grantees on that list.

Global philanthropy has been transformed by many factors, not least among them the electronic information revolution that enables instantaneous contact between staff in field offices and headquarters. This means that ways of working have changed, and so have the interactions among staff in field offices and headquarters. Whereas field office communications with New York once took place primarily through weekly airmail pouches, today it is not uncommon for Foundation staff in Asia to stay up late at night for regular teleconferences. Grants processing, meeting agendas, budgeting and accounting, personnel, and other operations are increasingly uniform, digitized and centralized in the hands of managers based at headquarters.

Ford's global structure entails reaching the right balance between operational efficiency and field office creativity and autonomy. Running field offices with international staff is an expensive business that demands attention to maintaining an institutional profile in local contexts, to nurturing extensive networks, and to making sure that New York staff includes people who understand the complexity and nuance of overseas work. Some experienced hands have wondered if Ford's 'back-office' functions could more easily be centralized entirely in New York, which would mean even smaller staff levels overseas. Indeed, few philanthropies these days see utility in keeping in-country staff on the ground, preferring an approach that flies out teams of consultants and evaluators instead. This may be effective for donors who design programs at a distance and then 'contract out' to appropriate governments or non-profits for implementation. However, it might not be as productive an approach for Ford's traditionally more engaged philanthropy.

In a recent speech accepting an award from the Studio Museum in Harlem in New York City, President Walker noted that the arts are a powerful tool for challenging

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BRITDOC Foundations that will provide second-stage funding for joint projects by social entrepreneurs and filmmakers

22 See www.data.foundationcenter.org for relevant lists and tables.

"persistent stereotypes and cultural narratives that undermine fairness, tolerance and inclusion". Such narratives persist outside the boundaries of the United States, and are troubling in the Asian settings of Ford's field offices. In India, for instance, exclusionary social structures persist alongside a rampant, growing religious nationalism that is leading to oppression of minority communities and growing censorship in the arts, literature, and the teaching of history. Many ethnic minority peoples of China, especially in the Tibetan and Uighur regions, face relentless pressure on their languages, religions, and lifeways. In Indonesia, religious intolerance is expanding into both cultural and political spheres in alarming ways. The Foundation has accumulated significant experience in these countries with local activists who promote historical interpretation, appreciation of ethnic diversity, creative expression, and the vitality of living traditions – experience that could be translated into changing contexts to address current challenges.

In the end, what matters for Ford's international philanthropy is not only how aspirational it might be in promoting disruption of the drivers of inequality. What will also matter is whether it uses the unique leverage of its offices around the world to sustain grant making that is informed by local insight, in the hands of creative and engaged staff who can implement its realigned mandate in grounded, relevant ways. I have suggested that a focus on culture and humanities embeds credibility, empathy, and deeper awareness within the Foundation. Such focus has made the Foundation an exceptional donor during the rich history of its grant making in Asia. As an organization that tries to place people's real-world experience, dreams, identities, and vulnerabilities foremost, the Ford Foundation has from the beginning of its work in Asia seen a role for attention to cultural vitality and creative interpretation of human experience. That is a unique and immeasurable part of Ford's own heritage – and one that its leaders should be proud to sustain.

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